(b) if so, the details thereof;

(c) whether the claim of scientists is true that there would be acute water shortage as these glaciers are vital for water supplies to millions of people in the Himalayan region;

(d) if so, the details thereof;

(e) Government's efforts to save the glaciers from climate warming; and

(f) whether any report has been prepared by his Ministry in this regard?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF ENVIRONMENT AND FORESTS (SHRI NAMO NARAIN MEENA): (a) and (b) Studies carried out by the Geological Survey of India have revealed that the Himalayan glaciers are passing through a phase of recession, which is a worldwide phenomena. The recession of glaciers is a part of the natural cyclic process of changes in size and other attributes of the glaciers. These changes could be attributed to various reasons including global warming. Bhagirathi and Alaknanda rivers confluence to form Ganges at Deoprayag. As per glacier inventory details of Geological Survey of India Bhagirathi basin has 238 glaciers while Alaknanda basin has 407 glaciers. Glaciers that feed Ganges are likely to sustain for centuries.

(c) and (d) Due to melting of ice, consequent upon faster recession, runoff of rivers may increase, initially. This scenario, however, may ultimately lead to overall reduction of water availability in futures, as the size and number of glaciers may reduce.

(e) The recession of glaciers is a natural cyclic process characteristic of the interglacial period. It is practically not possible to save the glaciers through artificial measures.

(f) In order to develop proper understanding of glaciers, the Government has commissioned a few studies including a comprehensive programme on the inventory of glaciers, fluctuations in their sizes and mass balance.

Loss of dense forest cover

1312. SHRI R. KAMARAJ: Will the Minister of ENVIRONMENT AND FORESTS be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that the country had lost about 26,000 Sq. Km. of dense forest cover in 2003;

(b) whether it is also a fact that there are hurdles in achieving the target of 33 per cent tree cover by 2012; and

(c) if so, the details thereof?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF ENVIRONMENT AND FORESTS (SHRI NAMO NARAIN MEENA): (a) No Sir. As per the State of Forest Report, 2003 (SFR, 2003), biennial report published by Forest Survey of India, the real decrease in dense forest cover is assessed to be 4,605 Sq. km. only, whereas the decrease to the extent of 21,640 Sq. km. is due to interpretational corrections mostly in 1 to 25 ha. patches outside the recorded forests such as crops like cotton, sugarcane etc. which give reflectance similar to that of forest cover. But, at the same time, the open forest cover has increased by 29,040 Sq. Km. over the previous assessment of SFR, 2001.

(b) and (c) As per the State of Forest Report, 2003 the forest and tree cover of the country is 23.68% of its total geographical area wherein the assessment of new plantations of 5 to 10 years have not figured as they can not be captured through Satellite images. To achieve the target of 33 per cent of the forest cover by 2012, non-forest areas are to be covered under forest and tree cover with the help of State Forest Departments, different Ministries, Voluntary agencies, Community based organizations and Public-Private Partnerships. This requires an additional financial resource mobilization.

Pollution in metro cities

1313. SHRI RAJU PARMAR: Will the Minister of ENVIRONMENT AND FORESTS be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that due to industrialization and increase in vehicles, air in metropolitan cities has become polluted and poisonous;

(b) if so, the average level of pollution in the metro cities during the last three months; and

(c) the effective steps Government propose to take to protect the population from any calamity in future?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF ENVIRONMENT AND FORESTS (SHRI NAMO NARAIN MEENA): (a) and (b) Enhanced